Obituary: Ian Stevenson, M.D.

Ian Stevenson (1918–2007), pioneering survival researcher and founder of the University of Virginia's Division of Perceptual Studies, died at home of pneumonia on February 8, 2007, after many years of coping with a chronic lung infection. Dr. Stevenson attended St. Andrews University in Scotland and graduated with both a B.A. and an M.D. from McGill University in Montreal, where he was first in his class in medicine. Trained initially in internal medicine at Tulane University, he became disenchanted with the reductionist biomedical focus and switched to psychiatry.

Finding the prevailing Freudian paradigm of the time equally unsatisfactory, he turned to psychosomatic research at Cornell University, producing groundbreaking studies of the impact of emotional factors on heart irregularities. From Cornell he returned to Tulane University, from which he was recruited at the young age of 38 to Chair the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Virginia.

Following extensive reading in the literature of paranormal experiences, his professional interests shifted to questions associated with survival after death. Over the next five decades, he traveled six continents, accumulating more than 2,500 cases of young children who recountsd details of previous lives, which he meticulously verified with witnesses, hospital records, autopsy reports, death certificates, and photographs. His research was published in more than 300 publications and 14 books, including his 2,268-page Reincarnation and Biology in 1997. His many publications on near-death experiences (NDEs) focused on their veridical features and their implications for our understanding of mind/brain interactions and the possibility of survival of bodily death.

With an endowment from Chester Carlson, the inventor of the Xerox process, Dr. Stevenson established at the University of Virginia what became the Division of Perceptual Studies, the only academic unit in the world dedicated to the study of the question of postmortem
survival, including near-death experiences (NDEs) as well as deathbed visions, memories of previous lives, apparitions, and mediumship, and related phenomena.

Despite the empirical rigor for which his research was hailed, Dr. Stevenson was modest in interpreting his research findings. Ever the embodiment of academic rectitude, he regarded the evidence as permitting but not compelling a belief in postmortem survival. He was a founding member of the Society for Scientific Exploration and the *Journal of Scientific Exploration*, was elected President of both the British and American Societies for Psychical Research, and was the recipient of numerous other awards.

Dr. Stevenson had no biological children but left numerous younger colleagues whom he inspired, trained, and nurtured in their own careers.